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MUTUAL AID-COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN NORTHWEST CHINA

[Comment and Summary: This report presents information on the mutual aid-cooperative movement in Northwest China, taken from the monograph by Hsi Ching-ch'en entitled Kuan-yu Hsi-pei Ti-ch'u Nung-yeh Hu-tsu Ho-tso Yun-tung (The Mutual Aid-Cooperative Movement in the Northwest Area of China), published in September 1952 by Hsi-pei Jen-min Ch'u-pan-she, Sian.

The progress of the mutual aid-cooperative movement was discussed at a conference in June 1952, and plans were made then for further developing the movement during 1952-1953. Topics discussed included development of the correct kind of organized labor, guarantee of effective party leadership, national economic assistance, and a firm basis for future growth.]

Achievements

An Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperative Conference was convened on 6 June 1952 by the Northwest Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party to discuss several aspects and problems of the mutual aid and cooperative system.

The Northwest has basically completed land reform. Sinkiang has put into effect a widespread program to reduce rents during the winter of 1951-52, and is making plans to implement the land-reform program during the 1952-53 season. From the time of the liberation to the present, farmers have kept their positive attitude toward increasing production, and this year agricultural labor mutual aid teams have greatly expanded in the Northwest. According to incomplete statistics, five provinces and one municipality in the Northwest already have more than 620,000 mutual aid teams (using statistics from only 213 hsiens). There are also 129 agricultural production cooperatives. Over 6 million agricultural workers have been organized into mutual aid teams, with organized labor accounting for 45 percent of the labor force in the Kuan-chung area of Shensi.

Other areas, such as Kao-ling Hsien in Shensi, Kansu, Ningsia, and Tsinghai, have nearly 80 percent of their labor force organized into mutual aid teams. The mutual aid movement has made important gains both last year and this year in many new agricultural areas, expansion in every province being more than double that of last year. This is a very natural trend because, although the land reform solved the main problems of agricultural production, i.e., those of land and basic production materials, it did not solve all agricultural operating problems.

For example, investigations in Kao-chia-wan Ts'un, Ch'ang-an Hsien, Shensi, show that the entire village of 167 farm households owned very few animals after the land reform. The eight households of tenant farmers had no animals at all; out of 107 households of poor farmers, only 36 owned animals; and in the group of 52 middle-class farmers five families had no farm animals. Carts and water pumps were also scarce, with tenant farmers lacking them completely, poor farmers having only two carts and three water pumps altogether, and the middle-class farmers together owning four big carts, four small carts, and six water pumps. Other farm implements were in correspondingly short supply. It is evident that the mutual aid system solves the farmers' difficulties by relieving their most urgent needs.

STAT

Another example in Shensi is Wei-chia Ts'un, Pai-shui Hsien, where eight men in the Kao San-chin mutual aid team hoed 194.6 mou [about 32 acres] of wheat fields in a 9-day period, averaging 2.7 mou [about 1/2 acre] per day per man. In the same ts'un, 16 men who were not organized hoed only 174 mou [about 29 acres] in a 10-day period, averaging 1.1 mou [about 2/10 acre per day per man. The work rate per man for laborers organized into mutual aid teams was more than double that of those who were not organized.

In the Third Ch'u, Fifth Hsiang, Chao-pa Hsien, more than 11 days were required to plant 3,000 mou [about 500 acres] of cotton fields last year. This year, with the organization of 96 mutual aid teams, the planting was completed in 4.12 days. After the Chao Chien-t'ai mutual aid team and eight others were organized in Kao-chia Ts'un, Shui-hua Hsien, they had surplus labor to put into supplementary industry and still produced 12 shih [about 1,240 liters] of grain per person in a 2-month period.

Wells have been dug and drains repaired in many areas through the quick and excellent action of mutual aid teams. The use of modern farm tools and chemicals has clearly promoted the rapid expansion of agricultural production and the elimination of backwardness. However, there are many problems connected with expansion of mutual aid teams, especially the tendency to blind expansion without foresight or planning. A more deliberate approach must be made.

After the land reform, those in agricultural villages found it necessary to help the expansion of farmers' individual economy and at the same time to strengthen the farm economy through mutual aid and cooperative means. Since organization of mutual aid and cooperatives was one of the party's major objectives, Chairman Mao in 1943 established the slogan, "Organize." Mao explained that the completely individual economy had been the basis of feudalism, with each family struggling to care for all its own needs and growing increasingly poor in the attempt. Only through a cooperative movement could families prosper. Three years after the liberation the agricultural areas had undergone a complete change; even the basis of their economy was new and different. A study of Kao-chia-wan Ts'un, Ch'ang-an Hsien, last spring showed that it had completed land reform, and this year revealed that 104 of 107 poor households had considerably improved economically (the other three had failed to improve only because of illness and old age). Since the land reform, 30 percent of the poor farmers have become middle-class farmers. After this year's harvest of two-season crops, the poor farmer's income will have increased 20-25 percent over 1951 and 40 percent over that of the time before land reform. Many more poor farmers will be in a position to purchase animals and farm equipment after the summer and fall harvests. It is estimated that, by next winter, 70-80 percent of the poor farmers in Kao-chia-wan will have advanced to middle-class status. A similar situation exists in the Kuan-chung area of Shensi, where it is foreseen that the middle-class peasants will comprise most of the population in 2-5 years.

A middle-of-the-road policy must be followed, with strong leadership to prevent either overexpanding or diminishing of production. Situations must be avoided where farmers either become very rich or else fail completely and are forced to become hired workers. Although the rich peasant economy can exist in the new China, it is definitely undesirable and should be controlled. This does not mean that our goal is to be poor rather than rich. The goal is to make all the farmers rich, even richer than the wealthy peasants, by employing collectivized work methods and excelling the wealthy peasants.

After land reform, it was impossible completely to avoid a certain degree of class distinction among the farmers, but through the use of mutual aid and cooperative methods and organized labor, and with the assistance of the national economic plan, most peasants will be able to maintain the position of

STAT

middle peasants. They will never again fall into poverty and, under the present system, will gradually attain the economic position of the "rich peasants." This is the basic objective of the mutual-aid cooperative movement in the Northwest.

Plans for the Future

According to current estimates, the over-all value of all agricultural production in the Northwest was 10 percent higher in 1951 than in preliberation days. In the future, a line must be followed which will lead to increasing the over-all value of agricultural production about 50 percent more during the next 4 or 5 years. In some comparatively good areas, such as the Kuan-chung area of Shensi and others, the increases may be even greater. Next year, land reform will be completed in the five provinces of the Northwest agricultural area, and after land reform the entire efforts of the agricultural villages will be concentrated on expanding agricultural production and secondary industries. It is difficult to change basic conditions in a short time, but the goal can be reached through organization of the masses, various types of assistance, and continuous effort.

In regard to mutual aid teams and cooperatives, the plan is to organize 60-70 percent of the rural labor force within the next 2 or 3 years; 20 percent of this force will be organized into permanent mutual aid teams operating all year, and every hsien will have from one to three cooperatives. With this as a basis, it is hoped that 50 percent of farm households will be organized into permanent mutual aid teams after 5 years and that each hsien will have an agricultural production cooperative. At present, 80-90 percent of the 620,000 organized mutual aid teams are small, temporary, simple models called "labor-exchange teams." These teams provide for mutual help among the farmers so that work may be done more quickly. Planting and cultivation can be finished seasonably, difficulties such as lack of tools and labor power can be eliminated, and fighting insects can be facilitated. In the next 2 or 3 years, 60-70 percent of agricultural households should be organized into this type of mutual aid team.

In the old liberated areas of northern Shensi, 30-40 percent are already organized into permanent mutual aid teams. The labor mutual aid movement had a firmer basis there, and the simple labor-exchange type of team did not suffice for the needs of continually increasing production. Thus the permanent team was developed to meet expansion. These permanent teams have a better future than the temporary, seasonal, simple labor-exchange teams. They can make more progress, improve techniques, develop a liaison with various secondary industries, aid farmers who have never used machinery and draft animals, and do many things which are difficult for the average farmer, such as building dikes and canals. In Shensi Province, 10-20 percent of the mutual aid teams are permanent, but other provinces have few at present. In the next 4 or 5 years, this type of team must become numerous and widespread if rural production is to continue expanding. Although the problem seems simple, it presents complications because of the resources required and the enormous potential involved in such a vast plan.

Although agricultural production cooperatives are still more or less in the experimental stage, during the transitional period from small agricultural economy to socialism, the cooperatives will supply the basic form for collective farms. At this stage, several points must be observed and preparations must be made. The development of cooperatives depends on certain conditions: the needs of the masses engaged in production, the firmness of the mutual aid movement as a base, the strength of the leaders and cadres, and the positiveness of the people's attitude. Both economic and technical conditions must be improved,

STAT

with good planning and experimentation. In 1952, 129 agricultural production cooperatives were established in the Northwest, but only a small number of these had a firm basis, good leadership, and planning. The majority were set up blindly, as in Mi-chih Hsien, where 63 cooperatives were "developed" in one day, and in Tzu-chou Hsien, where 23 were established in one day. The situation has great potentialities, but adequate preparations must be made and plans carried out under good leadership.

Problems

During the period of mutual aid-cooperative organization, the following problems remain to be solved.

1. No discrimination should be shown in organizing poor, hired farmers and middle farmers into mutual aid teams and cooperatives. The entire rural population must form a smoothly coordinated working body. Poor and hired farmers should be assisted in solving their problems, and at the same time the welfare of the middle farmers should be protected. While poor and landless farmers figure most heavily in the mutual aid-cooperative organization at present, the middle farmers will receive the greatest emphasis after land reform has been satisfactorily completed and the correct conditions established, because they will comprise most of the population.
2. Cost accounting must be improved, because without good accounting it is impossible to guarantee profits to the farmers. At present there is a lack of accurate information regarding amounts and location of animals and tools used in agriculture. Records must be kept if planning is to be accurate.
3. Mutual aid teams must increase production so that it will surpass that of the neighboring independent farmers. In trying to organize independent farmers, persuasive methods and education should be used instead of force. Surplus labor strength should be turned into improving the soil, revising agricultural techniques, building dikes and canals, planting fruit trees, and doing afforestation and other worthwhile work. Also, progress should be made in raising sheep, hogs, and other domestic animals, in making wood and bamboo products, and improving handicraft industries, transportation, and all the secondary industries. Agricultural production should be a united effort, without control or exploitation of the workers, thus preventing the growth of capitalism.
4. Enlarged production within the mutual aid teams calls for buying new agricultural implements and animals which will become public property. It is important to mutual aid teams and cooperatives to buy large machinery and animals which the small independent farmers can neither afford nor handle. Formerly, individual farmers would sell farm tools at a reduced price to become public property of the mutual aid team, but this has not proved to be a good practice. Possession of some private property gives incentive to the workers; thus, although most agricultural equipment should be public, private property should not be completely eliminated.
5. In the new areas, it is not fundamentally necessary to assimilate rich farmers into the mutual aid teams and cooperatives. If they have already joined and are doing a fair share of the work, they may remain, but if they brought laborers with them to do their work and are exploiting these laborers, they must be eliminated. If they are capable, and can be good leading cadres, they should not withdraw, providing the masses are willing for them to remain in the organization. In the old areas, land has already been divided up and the exploitation of hired workers by rich peasants no longer exists.

STAT

6. No former landlord whose change of status has not been confirmed by the masses will be permitted to join a mutual aid team. However, local bandits, vagabonds, and former KMT lower officials who are willing to work and produce can join mutual aid teams, although they can never become leaders. They can be helped by supervision and hard work.

7. Under the provisions of the people's government, families of heroes and soldiers who are lacking in manpower can join mutual aid teams to solve their planting and cultivation problems if it is agreeable to the regular members of the local teams. The same arrangement applies to orphans and widows. Those households who own a little land and perhaps rent part of it or manage land for someone else can also join teams if they have the manpower to contribute. However, those who have only land to contribute cannot join. Men and women work on an equal basis and should be paid equally according to the work points they collect. In some places, women are paid only half as much as the men, and this is not right.

8. Rural cadres should not demand special privileges in mutual aid teams. Rural members of the Communist Party and youth corps should show a positive attitude toward mutual aid and cooperative organizations, not only joining them but also becoming leaders and models in labor and public affairs.

9. Mutual aid teams and supply and marketing cooperatives should work together, following a "unified contracts" method so as to guarantee the carrying out of supply and marketing according to plan. Thus, mutual aid teams can gain national economic support through the cooperative setup, and will gradually be able to coordinate their own production with national plans.

10. At present, state farms must carry out a program of readjustment, correcting affairs which have been badly handled by getting to the root of the problem. By next year [1953], each hsien should have a state farm for demonstration purposes. Every province should increase its number of agricultural toolmaking plants and agrotechnical stations. The current problem of agricultural tools should be solved by more complete utilization of the present supply of tools and a gradual expansion of the use of new-style tools in accordance with local conditions. Agricultural techniques should be expanded not only with the guidance of experts but also with the cooperation of the masses.

11. The rural population must be educated. There are too many meetings in rural areas which do not solve the real problems of the farmers. All this must change. By 1953 we plan to have a good educational program for the rural people of the Northwest which will raise the literacy rate and generally elevate the cultural level of the people.

Conclusion

Finally, two things are important to the successful operation of a mutual aid team: (1) a hard core, and (2) regular political activity, i.e., party activity to prevent infiltration by wealthy peasants, landlords, and bad elements. Party leaders must be active in discovering activists in mutual aid teams and enrolling them in the party and youth corps. Cadres must have actual field work in advising and helping to solve problems in mutual aid teams. Paper work is not enough. Conferences of mutual aid team delegates may be held semiannually to give instruction.

Production is of chief importance in rural areas and mutual aid teams are the key factors. Most of the problems in rural areas can be solved by activists in mutual aid teams. They can strengthen the rural people's dictatorship. All workers must regard rural organization as their greatest responsibility; no

STAT

matter what specialties they may possess, all comrades must learn how to organize a mutual aid team. A party member who never leaves his office is of no use to the people. We want party members who are conversant with the people's problems through actual experience. How can a writer put freshness into his writing unless he has shared the toils of the people? Throughout the country this autumn conferences to discuss the mutual aid team movement must be held to work out plans according to local conditions.

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- 6 -